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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 MADRID 000970

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: N/A

TAGS: [EAD](#) [ECON](#) [OEXC](#) [OSCI](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [SENV](#) [SOCI](#) [TNGD](#) [SP](#)
SUBJECT: CONSULTATIVE PROCESS FOR MUSLIM ENGAGEMENT - MADRID

REF: STATE 71325

¶1. SUMMARY: Following the President's Cairo speech to Muslims around the world, U.S. Mission Spain continues to engage Muslims as part of our outreach to Spain's growing and increasingly diverse immigrant and minority communities. Our objective is to create a vision of mutual respect, advancement, collaboration, and opportunity. The Mission pursues these objectives by incorporating the full range of PD resources and programs, including engagement activities by Mission officers, exchange programs, conferences, information sharing, outreach through and in collaboration with community organizations, and in personal contacts with religious and community leaders, NGOs, students and policy makers. END SUMMARY.

BACKGROUND:

¶2. Over the past 20 years, Spain has been experiencing tremendous demographic changes due to a large influx of new immigrants. The largest immigrant populations come from Romania, followed by Morocco, Latin America, and sub-Saharan Africa. These relatively recent arrivals now account for roughly 11.3 percent of Spain's population of approximately 46 million. The majority of immigrants have come to Spain principally for economic opportunity and the relatively generous wages, benefits, and comprehensive health and social safety net. These immigrants, including Muslims, come seeking work, but they also bring their cultures, religions, and customs with them. Spaniards had been generally tolerant of, and somewhat indifferent to, the new arrivals while the economy was booming. But as the current economic crisis and high unemployment rates continue to stretch the limits of the social security safety net, we expect to see evidence of strained relations between Spaniards and immigrant communities. Thus, promoting integration and respect for diversity are two objectives of Post's engagement strategies.

¶3. Spain's diverse and rapidly growing Muslim community - mostly from Morocco and Algeria, but also from Syria, Pakistan, and other countries - is a very new phenomenon by Western European standards. In 1992, there were approximately 50,000 Muslims in Spain, mainly Spanish converts and immigrants from Syria, the Palestinian territories and other Middle Eastern countries. Today, official statistics put the number of Muslims at around 1 million (or just over two percent of the total population), with the majority coming from Morocco (owing to its close proximity and lack of economic opportunity), but also increasingly from Pakistan. They, like other immigrants, are often sensitive about standing out, lacking in Spanish language skills, and frequently unaware of health, social, and government services available to them; therefore, they maintain a somewhat low profile in society. In general, most Spanish Muslims, and particularly youth, do seek integration into

Spanish society, and believe religion should not be an impediment to that integration.

¶4. Islam is one of the minority religious groups that signed bilateral agreements with the Government in 1992, recognizing their "deeply rooted" or notorio arraigo status. These agreements provide certain tax benefits and give civil validity to weddings performed by the religious groups. They also permit the religious groups to place their teachers in schools and chaplains in hospitals and prisons. Protestant entities signed the accord as the FEREDE; Jewish entities signed as the Federation of Jewish Communities of Spain (FCJE); and Islamic entities as the Islamic Commission of Spain (CIE). The CIE is composed of two federations: the Spanish Federation of Islamic Religious Entities (FEERI) and the Union of Islamic Communities in Spain (UCIDE). Despite the recognition of these and other religious-based groups, there is no effective, representative inter-faith council to coordinate, collaborate or mediate on religious or social issues, and there is very little collaborative contact between UCIDE and FEERI.

THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

¶5. Since well before the President's Cairo speech, the Embassy has pursued a broad-based approach to engagement with Muslim communities that incorporates a multicultural vision, rooted in promoting integration, finding common ground, and youth outreach. The Embassy has been effective in creating fora (such as Iftar receptions, conferences, representational events, community outreach and exchange programs) that involve the participation of Muslims and non-Muslims in an effort to

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create opportunities for networking among the participants who otherwise might never meet or interact. For example, the Embassy designed a Citizen Dialogue exchange program that brought four American Muslims from diverse backgrounds to Spain to interact with Muslim communities and youth in several Spanish cities. The U.S. experience as a multi-ethnic, pluralistic society is a point of reference for many Europeans, and this program allowed us to share our own experience in addressing prejudice and discrimination while promoting greater integration of minority communities. It also helped develop networks among moderate Muslim leaders.

¶6. Our information and electronic outreach programs are designed to disseminate information about U.S. policy, government, society, and values that generate interest and encourage recipients to participate more actively through new social media and old-fashioned attendance at Embassy-sponsored outreach activities.

¶7. The Embassy is also reaching out to the Government of Spain's semi-autonomous cultural institutions that promote a better understanding of different cultures around the world. One of those "Casa Arabe" (Arab House), is dedicated to promoting a greater understanding of Arabs and Muslims; the Embassy has collaborated on conferences and information sharing. Shortly after the Cairo speech, the PAO met with the director to explore ways to expand that collaboration.

MISSION OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES / ACTIVITIES:

¶8. Continuing the Consultative Process: The President's Cairo speech can serve as a mile marker to demonstrate to local audiences that our ongoing efforts do indeed have the support and commitment of the highest level of the USG. Since our vision of integration is highly consistent with Spanish national and local government priorities on promoting integration, we continue to find willing partners in government, civil society, and among disenfranchised communities. For example:

(A) Community Libraries: The Embassy's Information Resource Center (IRC) has been in the forefront of efforts to leverage Spain's public, community libraries as multi-cultural centers promoting community integration. In workshops organized by the IRC and Spanish associations of librarians, U.S. Speakers help participants grapple with the day-to-day issues of greatest concern to immigrants, work on strategies for adapting to a new culture, and reinforce the importance of social dialogue. Participants are implementing plans to enhance the role of libraries as catalysts for cultural dialogue and to increase the availability of services in public libraries for immigrants, especially Muslim minorities and other marginalized groups. These plans require increased direct engagement with those groups in order to assess their wants and needs, and design responses to their priority concerns. Attracting youth is a priority for the libraries, but also helps Post address a priority of promoting integration and providing alternatives to extremist ideologies and criminal activities. The community libraries are not just venues for librarians to assist immigrants, but also platforms for Public Affairs cultural and outreach programs. The IRC has partnered with the Goethe Institute, the French Institute, regional governments, NGOs, librarians, and cultural mediators.

(B) International Visitors Leadership Program: Mission Spain's IVLP Committee continues to nominate Muslims to its slate of candidates each year. Embassy Spain has benefited from the IVLP's "Muslim Incentive Grants" since the incentive program began, thereby increasing opportunities for Muslims to participate in the IVLP, and increasing the number of Spaniards from different backgrounds participating in this prestigious USG exchange program. The litmus test for Muslim candidates is the same as for any candidate: they must have the demonstrated potential to be future leaders in their fields. Our Muslim IVLP grants may address Muslim-specific issues, but more often the Committee nominates Muslim candidates to participate in secular Regional Programs or Multi-Regional Programs with broad-based participation, including non-Muslims. Topics have included integration and civil rights in U.S. society, U.S. policy formulation, and politics and democracy in America, to give participants broader exposure to the diversity of the U.S.

(C) Iftar Events: over the past few years, the Chief of Mission has annually hosted an Iftar dinner or reception. This event has been gaining greater popularity among Post's growing

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base of contacts who are Muslim and/or who are active in civil society, NGOs and government programs dealing with Muslims, minorities, or social issues. These events demonstrate the importance the Embassy places on relations with Muslim leaders and communities and provides a forum for these diverse organizations to network among themselves.

(D) Islamic Websites: Following up on a well-attended conference funded by S/CT in November 2008, the Mission continues to work with WebIslam and representatives of the European Media Islamic Network, whose members pledged at the conference "to give voice to European Muslims" and present "shared Islamic values, such as pluralism, social justice, peace, freedom of consciousness and expression, journalistic integrity, the promotion of civil rights, understanding and cooperation between cultures and religions."

(E) Conferences: In fall 2009 Public Affairs will provide a grant to a young Muslim scholar to support her participation in a conference on promoting community integration. Upon her return, she has agreed to help PA organize an outreach program with Muslim youth. Post also supports conferences on counter-terrorism and related foreign policy issues.

(F) Exchanges: The Embassy will continue to broaden its outreach to minority communities and youth through exchanges that focus on integration, respect, for diversity, and volunteerism. The Participants in a FY-09 voluntary visitor

program for educators, social workers, academics, immigration lawyers, and NGOs from Cordoba were selected for their work with largely Muslim immigrant communities from Northern Africa and the Maghreb. Youth participants in follow-on exchanges were selected for their volunteerism and sensitivity towards immigrant communities. The Embassy continues to engage these participants in follow-up activities based on the themes from the Cairo speech.

(G) The Embassy invited representatives of Spanish government, civil society, news media, NGOs, political parties to watch President Obama's Cairo speech on June 4 (English) and on June 5 (Spanish). The events provided opportunities for Muslims and non-Muslims to exchange ideas and impressions with each other and Embassy Officers. Post continues to rely on these and other contacts as sounding boards on the President's Muslim engagement agenda.

(H) Post's "Global Conversation," seeking feedback on Secretary Clinton's June 15 speech at the Council on Foreign Relations, touched on the topic of President Obama's Cairo speech. The eight guests included two Muslims, representing academia and politics.

(I) Misperceptions about U.S. foreign policy, counter-terrorism policy, and treatment of Muslims in the U.S. are not limited to Muslim audiences, and therefore, the Media Relations Office of Public Affairs, the Cultural Affairs Office, and Embassy Officers throughout the U.S. Mission, continue to engage all their contacts, especially those from the media, government and academia, to solicit their input on U.S. policy and messaging, and to correct their false stereotypes and misperceptions.

WHAT OUR CONTACTS ARE SAYING

¶9. Not surprisingly, in world affairs our Muslim contacts are interested in Middle East Peace, concerned about the plight of the Palestinian people, worried about Iran's nuclear ambitions and nuclear proliferation, and the impact of the economic crisis on developing countries. On issues closer to home, they are concerned with rising unemployment, economic opportunities, education, the impact of illegal immigration on the social service system, and the situation of the immigrants themselves. In this respect, their concerns are very similar to those of most Spaniards. Where the differences lie are in how they perceive themselves and their roles in Spanish society, and how Spanish society, which clings to a perception of Spanish "homogeneity," views them.

¶10. Spanish Muslims and Muslims resident in Spain appear to be receptive to President Obama's efforts to reach out to Muslims around the world. They did not fail to see the significance of the President's reference to the intolerable suffering of the Palestinian people on the one hand; however, they also took note of the President's commitment to the State of Israel. The nuances of U.S. Middle East policy will need to be emphasized

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and clarified over time to Muslim leaders and communities here in Spain, who remain skeptical of the ability of the Obama Administration to implement change, as well as to Spaniards and Spanish politicians, particularly those to the left of center.

CONCLUSIONS

¶11. In his study "Muslim Elites in Portugal and Spain," published in West European Politics (Vo. 32, NO.1, 55-76, January 2009), Andrew Gould cites Gilles Kepel: "The large majority of European citizens from Muslim descent share core European values, but they are not spreading their views on the religious market of ideas as such. This leaves that field rather open to people with a more radical vision." While Spain

boasts a vibrant democracy and a major, developed economy, the Embassy is concerned that a lack of leadership, collaboration, and social cohesion among Muslim communities (especially among poor, marginalized immigrants who are disproportionately and negatively affected by the economic crisis) creates openings for infiltration by extremist ideologies.

¶112. While many of the President's Cairo priorities speak to urgencies in countries with Muslim majorities and less-developed parts of the world, we see targets of opportunity to further promote the President's Cairo agenda through enhancement - and in some cases, expansion - of Post's existing programs in education and human development among youth, increased scholarship and exchange, internships, on-line networks, entrepreneurship and interfaith dialogue. That is why Post's outreach programs will continue to promote social integration, moderate views, educational, exchange, and economic opportunities, and an understanding that U.S. and western society is compatible with Islam and universal values.

CHACON